DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 194 480 SP 016 953

AUTHOR Tyler, Ralph W.
TITLE The Needs of Elementary and Secondary Education for the 1980's.
PUB DATE Jan 80
NOTE 17p.: Prepared for Subcommittee on Elementary, Secondary, and Vocational Education "Needs of Elementary and Secondary Education in the 1980's: A Compendium of Policy Papers." For entire document (microfiche only), see ED 185 660. For individual documents (microfiche and paper copy), see SP 016 934.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adolescent Development: *Citizenship Education: *Disadvantaged Youth: *Educational Needs: *Educational Opportunities: Elementary Secondary Education: Federal Government: *Government Role: *Lifelong Learning: Needs Assessment: Self Actualization

ABSTRACT

The most pressing needs of elementary and secondary education for the 1980s are likely to be in four areas. Federal assistance will still be necessary to furnish real educational opportunity for disadvantaged children. Federal encouragement and support is needed to reverse the neglect of citizenship education. The transition of children and youth into constructive and responsible adults needs to be much smoother and the federal government can help localities to act in this regard. Finally, the serious erosion of out-of-school educational opportunities can be stopped and the educational system rebuilt with strong encouragement and support from the federal government. (Author)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED194480

THE NEEDS OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION FOR THE 1980'S

RALPH W. TYLER

DIRECTOR EMERITUS, CENTER FOR ADVANCED STUDY

IN THE BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES AND SENIOR CONSULTANT

SCIENCE RESEARCH ASSOCIATES

ASSUMPTIONS

The needs of education in a nation depend to a considerable extent upon the conditions in the country at that time. Hence, in discussing the needs of American elementary and secondary education for the 1980's, it is necessary to state the assumptions made about relevant conditions that seem likely to be present through much of that decade.

I am assuming that the birth rate of mothers with little or no education, especially that of illegal immigrants, will continue to be much higher than that of mothers who have completed at least ten grades of schooling. For this reason, I estimate that the proportion of disadvantaged children in our school population will continue to be 15% to 20% of the total in spite of the increasing number of adults who have completed high school. These children will be found mostly in very rural areas of the South and Southwest, and in the "Inner Cities" of the large metropolitan areas.

SP 06 953

The total population of school children will continue to decline until 1985 and then increase at the rate of 1% or 2% per year through the end of the decade. This increase is estimated because the large number of children of the "Baby Boom" after World War II who are reaching their child-bearing years.

I am assuming that the demand for educated persons in America will continue to increase because of: (1) the increasing use of science and technology that eliminates the demand for unskilled labor while increasing the occupational demand for persons with intellectual and social skills, (2) the increasing complexity of the nation's economic, political, and social problems that require educated citizens to provide intelligent public support for sensible solutions, (3) the increasing need for educated parents to deal constructively with the problems involved in the development of children and youth in American society, and (4) the rising aspirations of parents for the education of their children.

Finally, I am assuming relatively austere financial support for elementary and secondary schools because of the increased demands for public support of other social services. This increasing number of senior citizens make social security more costly. The demand for police and fire protection, for health services and for public transportation produce increasing pressure to hold constant expenditures for public education or even to reduce them. Hence, it seems unlikely

that American elementary and secondary schools can obtain a significant increase in their support from tax funds.

Educating Disadvantaged Children

It is possible in the desire to develop an ideal system of elementary and secondary schools to list many needs, but the resources that can be mobilized to meet the needs are always limited compared to this ideal. I shall focus my discussion on four serious problems faced by American public schools, problems which require substantial assistance if they are to be solved. The first, and in some respects the most obvious,is that of educating the disadvantaged children that seem likely to continue to represent 15% to 20% of the nation's school population.

In the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, the Congress gave explicit attention to the serious problems schools face in educating children who come from homes of poverty, where their parents have had little or no education. Many of these children were not learning what the schools were teaching. The legislation provided for substantial financial aid to the public schools enrolling a considerable concentration of these disadvantaged children to enable the schools to help the children to learn. In the first few years of these efforts very little measurable progress was noted, but as of 1978, nearly half were showing favorable results. However, progress is slow because of the many difficulties arising from educational assumptions and

principles which were developed when societal conditions were different and our knowledge of the conditions required for learning was very primitive. Attitudes of educators and the public have been slow to change while educational practices have had to be reexamined or reconstructed in the light of new experiences and experiments. The investigations of Francis Chase and his colleagues of the Urban Education Studies show clearly that the teacher's attitude toward disadvantaged children is a major factor in their learning. Where teachers clearly cared about their students, set high standard for their achievement and encouraged them, the children were learning. Where teachers showed no evidence of personal concern for the students and did not expect much from them, the children were learning little. Hence an important need is to help teachers understand and appreciate the potential of children from poverty and to enable them to give some personal attention, help and encouragement to their students. This will require substantial financial assistance for schools enrolling concentrations of disadvantaged children. Appropriate instructional procedures and materials are required but they will not substitute for teachers who care.

Improving Education for Citizenship

The American public has given strong support to a Back-to-Basics movement in which the Basics are usually defined very narrowly to include literacy and arithmetic. Yet, the vast majority of American children are not illiterate. The National Assessment of Educational Progress reports that

more than 80% of 17-year-old youth can comprehend the reading materials commonly used by adults. In arithmetic, more than 90% can add, subtract, multiply and divide accurately with whole numbers although less than half that proportion are able to use their computations properly in solving the problems adults commonly encounter in making purchases, figuring tax liabilities, and the like.

In the International Evaluation of Educational Achievement, the average test score in reading comprehension of American 14-year-old children was exceeded only by those of Finland and New Zealand, small countries with a relatively homogeneous population. The problems of student learning in reading and arithmetic are serious only with a small fraction of American children, mostly those who are economically and socially disadvantaged. Where American students are more widely lacking is in civic education.

In the International Evaluation of Educational Achievement, the average score of American 17-year-olds placed them in the lowest third of the thirteen advanced nations involved in the comparisons. A majority of the American youth did not appear to understand the basic functions of a political system and an economic system and did not seem to comprehend how our systems work. Only a bare majority expressed a belief in the principles that are so explicitly safeguarded in the Bill of Rights and only a minority report participating in civic activities. The emphasis in the past 25 years on

the rights of American citizens has obscured the importance of the balancing responsibilities that our forefathers recognized in the design of our nation. The need to strenghten and improve the education essential for the development of constructive citizenship is now clearly obvious.

Developing good citizens is not a simple matter. It involves acquiring knowledge, judgment, respect for others and concern for the common welfare. Young people need opportunities to practice good citizenship in the school and in the large community. They need to reflect upon their experiences and seek to understand the reasons for both their successes and failures as they carry on civic activities and practices. The school can make an important contribution to citizenship education, but the home and community experiences are crucial in the development of young people to assume their civic responsibilities.

The role of the school is a difficult one for several reasons. First, it is a new task. In the past, the school was one of several major institutions that supported and reinforced the dominant civic and ethical values of the community, but it did its part without conscious recognition that it was playing a significant role in the development of citizenship and character. The unconscious contributions consisted largely in providing in the school the kind of environment that was afforded by the typical home from which the students came. For his well-known readers, McGuffey

chose stories and essays that reflected the currently accepted values. Most teachers and administrators, however, were not aware of any educational objectives other than the development of reading skills and the broadening of the students' horizons as they comprehended the ideas presented in the stories and essays. Now, it is necessary for the school to reexamine the contemporary conditions, to identify the contributions that it is capable of making, and to encourage and support the efforts of other community institutions that have a part to play.

Second, it is difficult for the school to deal with citizenship education because the public school cannot be the chief contributor to such education and it cannot effectively dominate the coalition of community groups that must work out a feasible program of mutual responsibility. The school has had little practice in planning and implementing roles in which it is the junior partner.

Third, it is difficult because it requires the school to keep closely in touch with the out-of-school experiences of its students in order to focus on the real citizenship and moral situations these children are confronting. Simulated and contrived situations are not alone sufficient for the student to comprehend the dilemmas that tempt and disturb adult citizens, and they do not furnish the experiences of suffering or enjoying the consequences of action the student chooses in response to these dilemmas.

Effective citizenship education does pose some very difficult problems. Nevertheless, there are contributions the school can make. For example, the school can act in harmony with its traditional role of developing cognitive abilities and habits and encourage students to reflect upon the problem situations they encounter so as to analyze them and foresee consequences of the possible responses. Furthermore, the contributions of literature and drama that characterized education in the past are possible today. Stories, drama, novels, essays, and poetry can illuminate ethical issues and help students to understand and feel the significance of courage in acting in accordance with conscience. The school can also continue its long-accepted role of providing within its environment a more ideal democratic society than the adult community has yet been able to achieve.

The school has an important part to play in citizenship education but without a comprehensive community program, many young people will not develop into thoughtful and helpful citizens. The Federal Government can encourage citizenship education by supporting outstanding demonstrations of programs in which the school and the other major community institutions work closely together in furnishing opportunities for students to participate in civic affairs, bearing increasingly significant responsibilities as they grow and mature. A community advisory group should be involved to identify needs for learning experiences not previously available and to encourage appropriate institu-

tions and organizations to provide these opportunities for learning. Enough is now known about the processes of citizenship development to guide community efforts, but what is lacking is the actual cooperative participation of homes, schools and other socially-oriented organizations in the local community to provide the range of opportunities for youth to participate and learn. There is enough public sentiment favoring a strong thrust to improve citizenship education to assure a wide adoption of programs that are successful and appear feasible.

Improving The Transition from School to Adult Life

Concern for young people making the transition from adolescence to adulthood in the United States has increased over the past ten years. Opportunities for gradually assuming adult responsibilities, for participating with adults in a manner that engenders confidence in the ability of the young to take on adult roles, and for rendering meaningful service to others appear, it would seem, to be diminishing. Reports on these problems have been published by several different organizations but there has been no comprehensive outline of the educational issues involved, nor least of all have there been coordinated efforts by local communities to provide for a smooth transition. A particularly critical problem is the transition from school to work.

I do not need to repeat here what has been presented to

the Congress in great detail in connection with the debate on the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act. Often the high rate of youth unemployment is viewed as the result of the failure of vocational education in the public schools. Several commissions, advisory councils and consultants have proposed steps to improve vocational education. These are helpful, but the problem of developing an orderly and constructive transition from school to work is not just a problem of improving education. Somewhere between 20% and 30% of American youth never gain employment that can be considered a career. These young persons typically pass through a cycle of unemployment and employment in marginal dead-end jobs, like washing dishes and parking cars. They may work for several weeks or months, then are unemployed for a time. When they get a job again, it has no more future than the first one.

This problem cannot be solved at the national level although the Federal Government can help. The decision of the employers to restructure jobs, either within their own company or in cooperation with other companies, so that initial employment can lead sequentially to more responsible and demanding work must be made where the jobs are and where the young people are. The development of an appropriate educational and guidance program related to these job opportunities, including work-study, and other means of close interrelation between school and work must be

jointly worked out at the local level where the young people, the schools and the jobs are. No simple pattern will be adequate for the widely varying conditions of work, of schooling, and of living that characterize American society. But the Federal Government can give visibility to the need, can furnish financial incentives, and can support research and demonstrations required to perfect local programs.

The movement from school to work is not the only difficult transition for adolescents today. As children they have generally been the recipients of affection, psychological and social support and material goods - food, clothing and shelter. As adults they will be expected to give as well as receive, to serve others in the family and the neighborhood, to help in voluntary services of various sorts. The contemporary environment furnishes too few opportunities for young people to participate in society in these ways and to gain the satisfactions of mature responsibilities and services.

This situation has been so widely recognized that a variety of programs are developing in hundreds of communities. As a response to this need, the National Commission on Resources for Youth has identified more than a thousand programs in high schools in which students participate in constructive adult activities and assume real responsibility for what they do. Because the programs involve out-of-school

activities and require cooperation with public and non-profit organizations they have not been part of the curriculum in most high schools and middle schools. The Commission seeks to inform schools and community leaders generally about the potential educational value of such programs and put them in touch with localities that have worked out effective cooperation.

As with programs for easing the transition from school to work a single national model is not possible. But in this area too, the Federal Government can give visibility to the need and can support research and demonstrations of possible kinds of developments. The Federal Government can also assist in supporting local explorations of possibilities and the startup costs of working out a program through to its operational stage.

Reconstructing the Out-of-School Learning Environment

Perhaps the greatest need of elementary and secondary education in America is to rebuild the out-of-school environment which is so essential to the adequate development of children and youth. It seems incredible to many educational leaders that the public would give so little attention to the recent rapid erosion of the opportunities for out-of-school learning which most of us utilized in our own development. It takes only a casual review of one's own youth to see that the school was only a part of the educational system that furnished the experiences through which one learned to participate constructively in our modern

industrialized society. What one experienced in the home, in the social activities in the community, in one's chores and jobs, in religious institutions, in reading, in listening to radio and viewing television, and in the school – all are parts of the educational system through which one acquired knowledge and ideas, skills and habits, attitudes and interests and basic values. The school furnishes opportunities to learn to read, write and compute and to discover and use facts, principles, and ideas that are more accurate, balanced and comprehensive than that provided in most homes, work places, or other social institutions. The school also supplements and complements learning furnished by the other institutions and is usually an environment that represents the American social ideals more nearly than the larger society. In most schools, each student is respected as a human being without discrimination. The transactions in the classroom are guided by an attempt to be fair and to dispense justice, and the class morale is a reflection of the fact that the members care about the welfare of others.

The school has an important role to play in the education of children and youth, but it is only a part of the system and most of us learned more in the home and the other institutions of the community than we did in the school. Now the educational activities of the home, the religious institutions, the youth serving agencies, and the neighborhood gatherings

are greatly changed. For example, as late as 1960, only 26% of the mothers of school-age children were in the labor force. Now more than 55% are employed outside the home. In most of these homes no adequate provision has been made for the supervision of children when school is out and the parents are at work. Only the school is maintaining approximately the same role as in earlier periods with the same amount of time annually for its work with children and youth. The time no longer occupied by the other activities has largely been taken up by television. Schramm and Parker report that the average American child between the ages of 10 and 14 spends about 1500 hours per year viewing television and only about 1100 hours per year in school. When the educational expectations of the public are not realized in the performance of youth, common opinion holds that the schools have failed, ignoring the erosion of the non-school part of the educational system.

The increasing educational requirements for persons living in our complex society cannot be met without rebuilding the total educational environment for children and youth. Fortunately, most if not all local communities include a considerable proportion of persons who care about the future of our society and the education of our children. Provided with information about the local situation, these people can be mobilized to help in the rebuilding of the total educational system. This does not imply or require

public operation and support of all out-of-school educational experiences. The American public is not likely to vote the taxes required to furnish professionals to guide the education of children and youth in the many hours when they are not in school. Furthermore, a monolithic structure of the total educational system is inappropriate for a democratic nation, particularly a multicultural one. Volunteer leaders can be secured, as has been demonstrated by out-of-school educational organizations like the 4H Clubs, the Scouts, and the Junior Achievement Program.

Several surveys indicate that a large number of persons with knowledge and skills would like to teach them as a public service without remuneration. The strength and vitality of voluntary organizations have been frequently noted by foreign visitors. What is missing is the comprehensive identification of needs and authorized encouragement of those who could meet the needs These can be stimulated, encouraged and supported by government.

At the national level, the Congress can adopt a resolution endorsing comprehensive educational programs that include out-of-school opportunitites for learning, and stating a national policy to encourage the full development of human resources through comprehensive educational experiences. The Federal Government should authorize support for and appropriate funds to encourage and assist the establishment

of community councils and metropolitan or regional task forces to help in developing and maintaining comprehensive educational systems including both schools and voluntary groups.

The role of the community council is to assess educational needs of various groups of children in the community, identify actual and potential resources to help meet these needs, and suggest an outline of educational programs that volunteer groups are to be encouraged to develop. Some educational task forces must be drawn from the larger metropolitan area or region for educational needs that cannot be met locally.

In Summary

The most pressing needs of elementary and secondary education for the 1980's are likely to be in four areas. Federal assistance will still be necessary to furnish real educational opportunity for disadvantaged children. Federal encouragement and support is needed to reverse the neglect of citizenship education. The transition of children and youth into constructive and responsible adult life needs to be much smoother and the Federal Government can help localities to act. Finally, the serious erosion of out-of-school educational opportunities can be stopped and the educational system rebuilt with strong encouragement and support from the Federal Government.